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C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 000450

SIPDIS

DS/IP; CA/OCS; WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2039  
TAGS: [GY](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)  
SUBJECT: MORMON MISSIONARIES IN GUYANA DETAINED, ORDERED TO  
LEAVE

REF: A. A) GEORGETOWN 192  
[1](#)B. B) GEORGETOWN 418

Classified By: CDA WILLIAMS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The GoG detained 41 missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) for 11 hours on September 2, claiming they were in the country without valid work permits. Despite a court order for their immediate release, the Ministry of Home Affairs only freed the missionaries following a direct appeal to President Jagdeo from the Charge, and promises from the missionaries that they would leave the country within 30 days. It was unclear whether other LDS missionaries with proper authorization would have to leave as well, or if work permits would be approved for LDS missionaries in the future. The GoG,s motivation for the action is unclear, though the decision appeared to rest with the Minister of Home Affairs.  
END SUMMARY.

DETAINED ON A WHIM?

[1](#)2. (U) Guyana,s Criminal Investigation Department (CID) detained 41 LDS missionaries (39 of them AMCITs, all of whom signed Privacy Act Waivers) on September 2 from 0800 hrs until 1900 hrs and held one elderly missionary couple from 2000 hrs the previous night. Despite never formally charging the group with any offense, the Ministry of Home Affairs detained the missionaries in the CID,s lobby, confiscated their passports, and failed to provide them with basic necessities such as water, food, and toilet paper.

[1](#)3. (U) The Ministry of Home Affairs claimed the LDS were in the country illegally since denying the work permits of 50 missionaries on July 24. The group had filed an appeal on the permit decision, and under Guyanese law they were allowed to remain in the country until the matter was settled. A separate, second court order for the group,s immediate release issued September 2 had no effect on the Ministry,s decision to hold the LDS, who were let go several hours after President Jagdeo ordered their release.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Mormon Church has supported missionaries in Guyana for more than 20 years and currently has more than 60 missionaries working in the country--the vast majority AMCITs rotating in at six-month intervals. The Church claims 4000 Guyanese members in a country of 750,000 people and spends 1 million USD annually in Guyana supporting its activities.

[1](#)5. (C) The Charge raised the issue of the detention in a previously scheduled meeting with President Jagdeo. The President, who was visibly surprised by the news that the Ministry decided to expel the missionaries--and acutely aware of the negative media attention it would bring--immediately tried to reach the Minister of Home Affairs, who was unavailable, for an explanation. An hour later missionary

leaders met with the President who agreed to release them provided they left the country within 30 days. It was not clear if the Ministry of Home Affairs would issue work permits for LDS missionaries in the future.

&THE MINISTER WANTS THEM OUT8

¶6. (C) Though the impetus for the denial of work permits for LDS missionaries and subsequent decision to remove them remains unclear, the acting head of the CID unit was blunt about the GoG,s intent: The Minister wants them out., The missionaries told the Embassy that the police initially said they were detained for gathering information on behalf of the U.S., though the GoG denied it and stated the rumor originated with the U.S. Embassy. The missionary leaders who met with the president said he noted the GoG had received an increase in missionary applications from Muslim groups and implied there was a limit on how many missionaries any one group may have in Guyana, though he could not, or would not, name that number or produce any statutory information on category limitations.

¶7. (SBU) On September 3 the Embassy sent two dipnotes to the MFA, one protesting the fact the Embassy had not been notified of the detention of AMCITs and the conditions in which they were held. A second note sought clarification on the procedures for filing of work permits and extensions/renewals, as well as any numerical caps on categories or groups.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The expulsion comes as a surprise given the Church,s uneventful history in Guyana and the country,s long tradition of free religious expression. Aside from the

poor treatment and unjust detention of AMCITs, this episode is deeply disturbing on several levels. The fact that president was clearly caught off-guard at the news that the Ministry planned to expel a large group from a major religious organization and then was unable to reach the Minister of Home Affairs immediately suggests that Jagdeo,s position in the party has indeed weakened. The March 2009 death of Guyana,s former President and staunch supporter (see ref A) has provided an opening for the old-guard communist element in the ruling party to assert itself prior to the 2011 elections. Jagdeo, who became president in 1999 at age 35, appears not to have the support within the PPP to reshuffle the cabinet or remove incompetent or corrupt officials (see ref B). That the Ministry of Home Affairs did not even acknowledge that a court order existed for the release of the missionaries and it took an intervention from President Jagdeo himself for them to be released brings into serious question the GoG,s commitment to, or ability to enforce, the rule of law. END COMMENT.

Williams